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SUBJECT: CODEL BIDEN MEETS WITH FM BABACAN

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: CODEL Biden discussed with Turkish FM Babacan ongoing U.S.-Turkey cooperation and efforts to promote stability in the region, notably in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, during a February 22 meeting. Babacan described the EU accession process as integral to Turkey's ongoing democratic transformation. He said Turkey will continue its efforts to promote stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, namely through humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and by continuing the trilateral summit process, probably in April. He underscored Turkey's support for a prosperous, stable and multicultural Iraq, secure in its borders, looked toward progress on Cyprus and Armenia in 2008, and said Turkey's approach on the Ecumenical Patriarchate should be seen in the context of efforts to expand religious freedom in the country. END SUMMARY.

TRANSFORMING TURKEY

¶12. (SBU) Babacan welcomed CODEL Biden and emphasized the broad scope of U.S.-Turkey cooperation. Turkey embraces U.S. values of democracy, rule of law, pluralism and multiculturalism. The EU accession process is key to Turkey's future; it's not about one more EU member, but about transforming Turkey and the EU. Such a Turkey will negate arguments that Islam, democracy and secularism cannot coexist. From Morocco to Indonesia, Babacan said, the Muslim world is following Turkish reform efforts, thus contributing to democracy in the region.

STABILIZING PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

¶13. (SBU) Senators Biden, Kerry and Hagel briefly described their visit days earlier to Pakistan and Afghanistan. They praised Turkey's effort to bring together Presidents Karzai and Musharraf, as well as President Gul's pre-election engagement with Pakistan's opposition and Turkey's contributions to NATO/ISAF.

¶14. (SBU) Babacan reviewed Turkey's help to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan. He cited the PRT in Wardak. Turkey has built 24 schools -- now transferred to Afghan authorities -- and Turkish NGOs continue to operate six or seven other schools. Over 40,000 students have benefited from these schools. Turkey has also invested in health care facilities. Afghan perceptions of a foreign occupation create a fertile ground for terrorists; Turkey thinks more should be done on the development side, Babacan maintained.

¶15. (SBU) Turkey plans to bring Presidents Karzai and Musharraf

together again in Turkey, probably April 8, according to Babacan. President Karzai has agreed; confirmation from the Pakistan side is pending. Babacan said he had been the one to ask President Gul to visit Pakistan, and Gul's messages to all political parties there were clear: do not damage the stability of the country and participate in the political process. Bhutto's assassination had changed the mood, but Turkey will continue to do what it can to ensure Pakistan's stability. Babacan noted his recent visit to India, and said he found New Delhi also focused on Pakistan's stability. FM Babacan said he and his Indian counterparts had agreed to remain in closer touch on the situation in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

SUCCEEDING IN IRAQ

¶6. (SBU) Senator Kerry solicited Babacan's views on Iraq. Referring to Turkey's just-announced, limited incursion in northern Iraq against the PKK, Kerry urged Babacan to keep the Iraqi government in the loop and not complicate what we are trying to get done there. Babacan said Turkey is mindful of the concern Senator Kerry noted. He described Iraq as a neighbor and brother. Turks share ethnicity with the Iraqi people and care deeply about the country's stability and prosperity. Turkey has channels to every Iraqi group, without discrimination. It supports a multicultural Iraq, secure in its borders.

¶7. (SBU) Asked by Senator Kerry where we are in the process of reaching that objective, FM Babacan said the situation there is better than a year ago. The surge has helped, as have efforts to engage Sunni groups in the Iraqi government and parliament. More local ownership of Iraq's future is the key. FM Babacan appealed for more predictability in the future U.S.-Iraq relationship. The strategic framework agreement to be negotiated between the USG and GOI is crucial. Predictability will lead the Iraqi people to support the central government. Babacan also noted progress

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reflected in recent laws passed by the Iraqi Parliament. He noted Turkey's role in promoting the Iraq neighbors process. The comprehensive communique issued at the Istanbul ministerial reflected international consensus on the future of Iraq. He said the future status of Kirkuk is important and requires consensus from all sides. Turkey supports a special status for Kirkuk. If there is a referendum, we should be clear what it is about, who will vote, and what size majority will be acceptable.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESS ON CYPRUS AND ARMENIA

¶8. (SBU) While emphasizing a shared approach on many issues, Senator Biden pointed out two "irritants" in the relationship: Cyprus and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. While not defining issues in U.S.-Turkish relations, there is an inconsistency between Turkey's current, positive direction and the continued obstacles faced by the Patriarchate, such as the closure of the Halki Seminary. Senator Kerry opined that it is time to get something done on Cyprus and asked for FM Babacan's views. Senator Biden described as "historic" President Gul's congratulatory message to Armenian President-elect Sargsyan.

¶9. (SBU) FM Babacan said the biggest obstacle to progress on Cyprus was Papadopoulos. Sincere willingness on all sides to make progress is the key. He observed that the status quo has suited the Greek Cypriots. Nominally representing the whole island, the Greek Cypriot government has enjoyed a monopoly on EU funds, representation in the European Parliament, trade and tourism. Meanwhile, the Turkish Cypriots are isolated. Turkey would like to see more international pressure on Cyprus to solve the problem, through a comprehensive -- not piecemeal -- solution, based on the existing UN parameters. On Armenia, FM Babacan reiterated the GOT's offer to convene a historical commission to look at the shared histories of Turks and Armenians. Quoting Israeli President Shimon Peres, he said politicians should look to the future and historians to the past. Turkey has opened its archives, but this has not been reciprocated by Yerevan or by Armenian diaspora groups. However,

the Greek, Cypriot, Armenian and Turkish governments have all fresh mandates, making 2008 a year of possibility to work toward solutions.

¶10. (SBU) FM Babacan identified the Patriarchate issue as part of Turkey's trend toward religious freedom -- evidenced by the headscarf reform. He said the GOT wants to see European and American freedoms in Turkey. It is a process, but Turkey recognizes its responsibility. What Turkey does, he said, has an impact throughout the region, and even globally.

¶11. (U) CODEL Biden has cleared this message.